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Welfare Conditionality  
SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

# Final findings report

## Welfare Conditionality Project

### 2013–2018

[www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk](http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk)



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# Final findings report

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### 2013–2018

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**Welfare Conditionality**  
SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

**June 2018**

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# Contents

Executive summary: project key findings and recommendations	4
<b>Key findings</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Key policy recommendations</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Foreword and acknowledgements	7
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Context</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Methods overview	13
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Research design: a qualitative approach</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Ethical considerations and data handling/analysis</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Findings	18
<b>Effectiveness: welfare conditionality and movements from welfare to work</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>The efficacy of welfare conditionality in tackling anti-social and problematic behaviour</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>CASE STUDY: Harry – multiple sanctions and disengagement</b> ..	<b>20</b>
<b>Conditionality, social housing and behaviour change</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>CASE STUDY: Kate – Anti-social Behaviour Order</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Benefit sanctions</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Support</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>CASE STUDY: Peter – turning to survival crime</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Ethical debates</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>CASE STUDY: Joy – supported into work</b> .....	<b>26</b>
Key findings and recommendations from specific policy areas within the study	28
<b>Key findings</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Key policy recommendations relevant to specific areas within the study</b> .....	<b>33</b>
References	38

# Executive summary: project key findings and recommendations

## Key findings

- Welfare conditionality within the social security system is largely ineffective in facilitating people's entry into or progression within the paid labour market over time. Stasis, a lack of significant and sustained change in employment status, is the most common outcome for the substantial majority across the repeat interviews.
- Recurrent short-term movements between various insecure jobs, interspersed with periods of unemployment, are routine among the minority who were able to obtain some paid work across the period. Occasional sustained movements, off welfare benefits and into work, are evident – but are extremely rare.
- For a substantial minority, welfare conditionality within social security regularly initiates and sustains a range of negative behaviour changes and outcomes including:
  - counterproductive compliance
  - disengagement from the social security system
  - increased poverty, and on occasions, destitution
  - movements into survival crime
  - exacerbated ill health and impairments.
- Behaviour change in respect of both movements off social security benefits and also the cessation of anti-social or problematic behaviour is complex and rarely linear. More often it is characterised by periods of progress and regression.
- There is little evidence that social tenants adjust their behaviour as a result of having a fixed-term rather than open-ended tenancy.
- Benefit sanctions do little to enhance people's motivation to prepare for, seek, or enter paid work. They routinely trigger profoundly negative personal, financial, health and behavioural outcomes and push some people away from collectivised welfare provisions.
- Within conditional welfare interventions the provision of appropriate and meaningful support, rather than sanction, is pivotal in triggering and sustaining both paid employment and positive change such as the reduction of anti-social or problematic behaviours.
- Although some examples of good practice are evident, much of the mandatory job search, training and employment support offered by Jobcentre Plus and external providers is too generic, of poor quality and largely ineffective in enabling people to enter and sustain paid work.
- The flexibilities or 'easements' designed to suspend or reduce the work search/job related conditions attached to an individual's benefit claim in recognition of particular circumstances (eg, homelessness, lone parenthood, illness), are not currently being routinely implemented.
- Respondents commonly endorse the broad principle of welfare conditionality and there was widespread support for policies that promote responsible behaviour, paid work and other social contributions (eg, informal care work). But whilst generally supportive of linking rights to responsibilities, people believe that in many cases welfare conditionality is being inappropriately implemented.
- The ethical legitimacy of welfare conditionality within current provision is further undermined by its ineffectiveness in helping people enter and maintain paid work that lifts them out of poverty. The intensification and extension of benefit sanctions is widely viewed as unjust.



## Key policy recommendations

- As a minimum, welfare conditionality within the social security system needs to be rebalanced. The current preoccupation with sanctions backed compliance needs to be urgently reconsidered with more emphasis and resources focused on the provision of personalised employment support.
- There is a need for a widespread review of the benefit sanctions system to reduce the severity of sanctions, introduce clear and adequate warnings, improve communication with recipients, and to ensure that sanctions are not applied to vulnerable people.
- Variations and inconsistencies in implementation of easements need to be addressed. The DWP needs to ensure that Work Coaches are provided with appropriate training and time with each benefit recipient to agree, and review over time, adjustments in mandatory work preparation or job search requirements appropriate to each individual's personal and changing circumstances.
- The quality of the mandatory job search support and employment and skills training provided by Jobcentre Plus and external providers needs to be significantly improved. It should be more vocational, flexibly implemented and tailored to individuals' needs.
- Within social housing the FTTs policy framework should be abandoned. It has no discernible positive impact on tenant behaviour, nor is it likely to generate substantial additional lettings for households in need.
- More generally, in light of the growing body of evidence on the ineffectiveness of the intensified and extended system of welfare conditionality in moving people off social security benefits and into work, it is time for a comprehensive review of its continued use.
- The wider application of welfare conditionality within the benefit system for disabled people, those dealing with additional issues such as homelessness and alcohol or drug dependency, and for in work UC recipients, should be paused forthwith pending a more fundamental enquiry into its ethicality and usefulness for these groups.





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# Foreword and acknowledgements

The *Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change project* (2013–2018), or WelCond, was established in March 2013 following a successful application to the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Centres and Large Grants Scheme. WelCond is a major five year collaborative project involving teams of researchers from six UK universities in England and Scotland: University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, University of Salford, University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of York, which acts as the project's central hub. As I write this in June 2018 the initial WelCond study is drawing to a close and it falls to me as project lead to thank the myriad individuals and organisations that made the research possible.

First and foremost, I would like to thank all the individuals and organisations who participated in this research project and made it possible. This includes all those people who agreed to take part in the policy stakeholder interviews and practitioner focus groups and the numerous organisations who helped us to find welfare service users to take part in the repeat qualitative longitudinal interviews. A special note of thanks must go to all the people who, despite being involved in the various assessment processes and combinations of sanction and mandatory support inherent within highly conditional welfare systems, made time to share their experiences and insights with the research team. Among this group of respondents some faced lives blighted by deep poverty and homelessness, some were having to deal on a daily basis with ongoing impairment and addiction issues, whilst others were attempting to balance the challenges of searching for, finding, and maintaining paid work alongside wider familial responsibilities. Regardless of personal circumstance, on behalf of the WelCond research team I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to all of you for agreeing to be interviewed on one or more occasions.

In any undertaking of the size and duration of WelCond there is always some movement in respect of project staff as people's situations change. I'm extremely grateful to all the colleagues who have directly worked as team members, for periods of time ranging from a few months to the full five years, in various roles, across the duration of the project. Without your hard work none of this would have come to fruition. The full list of names and roles is as set out. However I would like to give a special mention

to three people; Project Manager, Fleur Hughes, Dr Vici Armitage who took over Fleur's role whilst she was on maternity leave and Dr Janis Bright the WelCond Impact and Communications Officer. All three provided invaluable support to myself and the wider project team that kept us on track against what were at times demanding targets and deadlines.

Next, I would like to thank the ESRC for funding the project under grant number ES/K002163/2. On a personal level I also want to acknowledge the help offered by the Research Portfolio Managers assigned to support WelCond, namely Ian Farnden (to 2014) and subsequently Jeanine Woolley. Thanks also to members of the Project Advisory Group which was chaired by Professor Bren Neale and whose members are as listed. Thanks also to Professor Alan Deacon for chairing various events.

Our vision was to create an international and interdisciplinary focal point for social science research on the effectiveness, impacts and ethics of the increasing use of welfare conditionality across a range of welfare sectors, within and beyond the UK, in order to influence future policy and practice. Ultimately others will judge whether or not we succeeded, but I am very grateful to all those local, regional, national and international policymakers, practitioners, service providers and welfare service users and academics who have contacted, interacted and argued with us over the past five years or so.

Moving forward, debate about the efficacy and ethicality of welfare conditionality will no doubt continue. Although the initial WelCond project is drawing to a close, aspects of our work will continue. A number of the team will be involved in completing a parallel study funded by the Forces in Mind Trust over the next twelve months and we will also be engaging in ongoing impact and dissemination work to take our findings forward in a range of settings. Our cohort of PhD students will also be completing their separate studies in the coming years and months. I hope the data, findings and policy recommendations contained within this report and the other published and forthcoming outputs generated by WelCond (see [www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk](http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk) for regularly updated lists) prove useful in your own work.

**Professor Peter Dwyer**  
University of York, UK, 8 June 2018

## Introduction

This report summarises the final findings of the Welfare Conditionality project (2013-2018). It presents analysis on the effectiveness, impacts and ethics of welfare conditionality, and the sanctions and mandatory support that underpin this approach. Discussion draws on analyses of qualitative data generated in interviews with 52 policy stakeholders, 27 focus groups conducted with practitioners, and repeat qualitative longitudinal interviews undertaken with welfare service users in England and Scotland (481 at wave a). Of these service user interviewees, 134 were in Scotland and 347 in England. Interviewees were drawn from nine policy areas: jobseekers, Universal Credit (UC) recipients, disabled people, migrants, lone parents, offenders, social tenants, homeless people, and those subject to anti-social behaviour (ASB) interventions and Family Intervention Projects (FIPs).

Welfare conditionality links eligibility for collectively provided welfare benefits and services to recipients' specified compulsory responsibilities or particular patterns of behaviour. It has been a key element of welfare state reform in many nations since the mid-1990s. The UK has been at the forefront of this behavioural policy turn. Conditional welfare arrangements, which combine engagement with

mandatory support mechanisms with various sanctions for non-compliance, are now an established and accepted part of social security, housing, ASB and the criminal justice systems. The past two decades have seen sanctions-backed conditionality intensified ([Adcock and Kennedy, 2015](#)) and extended to encompass previous exempt groups such as disabled people, lone parents and, since 2013 under Universal Credit (UC), low paid workers and their partners ([Dwyer, 2016](#)).

Those who favour welfare conditionality believe that the use of sanctions and support is a fair and effective approach which will enable people to move off welfare benefits and into paid work and/or desist from anti-social or problematic behaviour. Conversely, critics argue that behavioural conditionality is largely ineffective in promoting paid employment and personal responsibility, unfair, and likely to exacerbate social exclusion among disadvantaged populations.



## Context

Social security benefits for unemployed people in the UK have always required recipients to look for work as a condition of receiving benefit payments. Within recent decades, however, there has been an extension and intensification of conditionality for **jobseekers**. Proponents of welfare conditionality have viewed 'benefit dependency' as a principal explanatory factor for understanding unemployment. This has resulted in 'activation' based policies that intervene and structure welfare provision around behavioural requirements, such as job search targets and mandatory work activity. Overall, there has been a de-emphasis on the entitlement of recipients to welfare, and a rising dominance of a contractual ideology – with its prioritising of individual responsibility and reciprocity. This changing emphasis can be seen in the replacement of Unemployment Benefit with Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in 1996, with the name of the benefit conferring the status and expectations of the recipient ([Fletcher and Wright, 2017](#)).

Criticism of these policies sees the attention given to behavioural requirements as having been at the expense of demand-side policies and economic interventions to increase employment. Additionally, there has been a concern that the narrative of benefit dependency and policy measures introduced to tackle it has fostered stigmatisation of benefit recipients by laying blame on perceived individual failings. The sanctions regime as well, and the escalation in the length of a sanction for repeat transgressions, has been criticised as overly punitive.

[Universal Credit](#) (UC) is the new working age benefit that replaces six existing payments (Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit). UC is being rolled out across the UK. Its stated aims are to: simplify working age benefits, ease the transition between benefits and paid work, improve work incentives, provide employers with flexible workers, reduce fraud and error and prevent poverty. However, after UC was introduced, several [changes and cuts](#) were made, which reduced its generosity and [undermined its ability to deliver](#) on these promises. Here, we focus on the [impacts of the new conditionality regime](#) inherent in UC, which extends full-time jobsearch/work requirements, backed by sanctions (lasting indefinitely 'until compliance' and up to three years)

and mandatory forms of support to in-work recipients, as well as partners of recipients, for the first time.

Landmark [social security legislation](#) was introduced in **Scotland** in 2018, based on the principles of 'dignity, fairness and respect', which enshrine human rights in the delivery of 11 benefits (including reform of Personal Independence Payments and Disability Living Allowance) via the new agency [Social Security Scotland](#). Scotland's voluntary devolved employment services for long-term ill and disabled people are provided on a voluntary, sanction-free basis. [Fair Start Scotland](#) replaced the transitional schemes Work First Scotland and Work Able Scotland in 2018.

These new benefits and services were introduced after our fieldwork was complete<sup>1</sup>. The findings reported in this briefing relate mainly to the reserved part of the social security system that continues to operate throughout Scotland.

The [Scotland Act 2016 precludes](#) any alteration to sanctions or conditionality in the delivery of reserved UK working age benefits like Universal Credit (UC), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Most social security recipients in Scotland remain subject to conditionality and will continue to use UK-wide services like Jobcentre Plus, within a system characterised by intense and extensive conditionality.

Although Universal Credit recipients in Scotland have more choice than those in England (over receiving their payments weekly or monthly; and can now opt to have the housing element paid to their landlord), the new conditionality regime still applies fully to recipients who are in and out of work. UC extends full-time job search/work requirements, backed by sanctions (lasting indefinitely 'until compliance' and up to three years) and mandatory forms of support to in-work recipients, as well as partners of recipients, for the first time.

The introduction of ESA in 2007 extended for the first time the reach of welfare conditionality within the UK social security system to include many working age, **disabled adults** in receipt of long-term incapacity benefits. ESA is currently being phased out and replaced by Universal Credit (UC).

<sup>1</sup> Work First Scotland and Work Able Scotland operated April 2017-2018; and UC flexibilities were introduced in June 2017, near the end of our fieldwork, but none of our participants reported using them.



Following the application of a WCA to assess a person's functional capacity three potential outcomes may ensue for disabled ESA/UC applicants. First, those found 'fit for work' are subject to full work related requirements – maintenance of work availability and up to 35 hours' job search and preparation, including attendance at work-focused interviews (WFIs). Second, those assessed as having 'limited capability for work', but deemed likely to be capable of work moving forward, are placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) and must undertake mandatory steps to prepare for paid work in the future. In both of these first two outcomes, failure to undertake the personalised work related requirements as specified in the Claimant Commitment routinely results in the application of benefit sanctions. Third, individuals assessed as having 'limited capability for work and work related activity' due to their levels of impairment are not subject to conditionality and exempted from any work search and preparation requirements.

Those of extending welfare conditionality to disabled people, such as [Mead](#) (2011), argue that many recipients of incapacity benefits are unemployed rather than incapacitated, with barriers to work often being attitudinal. Critics, such as [Patrick](#) (2017), argue that the extension of conditionality for incapacity benefit recipients is inappropriate, punitive and largely ineffective in helping disabled people into paid employment.

Until relatively recently, **lone parents** claiming social security benefits in the UK were not required to look for paid employment until their youngest child reached school leaving age. Recent years have witnessed increased expectations, however, such that active attempts to seek or prepare for paid work have become mandatory for most lone parents' continued eligibility for social security.

[Key changes](#) have included the introduction of mandatory Work Focused Interviews (WFIs), Lone Parent Obligations (LPOs), and the Work Programme (WP). 'Age of youngest child' thresholds applying to LPOs reduced incrementally from 12 years in 2008 to five years in 2012, after which time lone parents with a youngest child aged five or older were treated in broadly similar terms to other jobseekers. From April 2017, Universal Credit (UC) requirements meant that parents of pre-school children aged three or four must look for work or risk being [sanctioned](#).

Lone parent '[flexibilities](#)' were introduced to Jobseeker's Allowance in 2008. When used, these allow lone parents to legitimately restrict their hours of work, depending on the age of their child and other circumstances. These flexibilities are not replicated in their entirety under UC, with many being relegated to guidance and others having been qualified so as to narrow their application.



Lone parents have also been affected by other recent reforms. Key amongst these have been: payment restrictions under the [Overall Benefit Cap](#) ('benefit cap'), restrictions to [Child Tax Credit](#), limits to the standard allowance [payable under UC](#) for lone parents under the age of 25, and removal of the [Spare Room Subsidy](#) for social housing tenants (that is, introduction of the so-called 'bedroom tax').

Alongside the behavioural requirements that are now embedded within the UK welfare state (and the central focus of the Welfare Conditionality project), many **migrants** face additional barriers to accessing welfare rights. This is due to the interaction of immigration and welfare policy that combines to structure a complex tiering of entitlement that defines migrants' eligibility to access social welfare benefits and services. The most recent example of this approach is restrictions applied to European Economic Area (EEA) migrants. Since 2014 the UK government has instigated substantial policy changes to further curtail the rights of EEA migrants to social assistance, such as the introduction of the 'Genuine Prospect of Work Test', more restrictive interpretation of the Habitual Residence Test, loss of right to Housing Benefit, and curtailment of EEA jobseekers' rights to Universal Credit ([DWP](#), 2016; Dwyer et al, forthcoming). Third Country Nationals (TCNs) who enter the UK through the asylum system and who are successful in their claim for refugee status (or other applicable leaves to remain) routinely have the same rights and responsibilities in respect of social rights as British citizens. That said, many struggle to come to terms with the mandatory requirements of the UK's highly conditional social assistance system when transitioning from the separate system of welfare support for asylum seekers. For some migrants, limited English language skills are also a significant factor that negatively impacts on their experiences of paid work and welfare.

Tackling street homelessness has been a [policy priority](#) in the UK for some time, with successive governments investing substantial resources in attempts to reduce its prevalence. In England, recent years have witnessed the increasing use of ['control' as well as 'care'](#) in initiatives targeting rough sleepers and those involved in 'problematic street culture' such as begging and street drinking. These have not been pursued to the same extent in [Scotland](#), where there has historically been less appetite to utilise highly interventionist or forceful approaches.

[Enforcement measures](#) adopted by English local authorities, in different combinations and with varying degrees of associated support, have included: arrest

under the Vagrancy Act 1824; Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO), Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO), Injunction to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance (IPNA), controlled drinking zones such as Designated Public Place Orders (DPPOs), Dispersal Orders, and designing out via 'defensive architecture'. These continue to be a source of [considerable controversy](#), albeit that the 'hardest' measures which allow for fines or imprisonment affect only a very small minority of homeless people.

Homeless people throughout Great Britain have also been affected by the increasing conditionality of [social security benefits](#) and use of sanctions for those who fail to comply with specific behavioural requirements. Jobcentre advisers were granted [discretionary powers](#) in 2014, known as 'the easement', to temporarily exempt rough sleepers and homeless people living in supported accommodation from requirements that they be available for work, actively seek work or participate in the Work Programme.

Two principal policy developments have significantly increased the conditionality applied to **offenders** in the welfare system. First, from 2012 all prison leavers who claimed JSA were meant to enter the Work Programme from 'day one' of their release. The rationale was that making support available at an earlier stage was necessary to address labour market barriers and prevent re-offending. Nevertheless, they are mandated to participate as a condition of receiving JSA and may be sanctioned for failing to undertake a mandated activity. Second, additional rehabilitative support is also being provided to short-sentenced prisoners. From February 2015, anyone sentenced to a custodial term of more than one day and less than one year, and is 18 years old or over when released, now receives supervision in the community. Participants are subject to sanctions if they breach their supervision conditions.

Addressing ASB has been a key priority for successive UK and Scottish governments since 1997, including the increasing use of intensive FIPs. In England, the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (2014) consolidated and extended existing legal powers. The Troubled Families Programme aimed to 'turn around the lives' of 120,000 families by 2020, although the programme was recently subject to a very critical [national evaluation](#).

In Scotland, the 2009 Framework, developed by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), 'Promoting Positive Outcomes' – with an emphasis on early and preventative

intervention – continues to underpin policy and practice addressing ASB. In both England and Scotland, approaches to tackling ASB have been increasingly devolved to local authorities and their partner organisations, with a reduction in the level of central government monitoring and evaluation of outcomes (see our [context paper](#)).

Individuals and households subject to conditionality-based interventions related to ASB experience multiple forms of vulnerability. A significant proportion of these individuals are now also subject to [new forms of conditionality](#) through assessment and sanctions relating to receipt of employment and disability benefits: This intersection of ASB and benefits conditionality is an [important context](#) for contemporary forms of support and sanction.

**Social housing** can operate as a [key site for conditional forms of welfare](#), wherein the prospect of losing one's home may be viewed as a [particularly powerful sanction](#) compelling desired behavioural patterns. The [erosion of the security of tenure of English social tenants](#) first began with the introduction, in 1996, of 'probationary' tenancies by the then Conservative Government, which meant that full security of tenure could be delayed for new social tenants (for up to 18 months), and then by the implementation of 'demoted' tenancies in 2003, by the then Labour Government, which reduced security for existing tenants subject to behavioural concerns.

The Coalition Government's Localism Act 2011 [took this agenda much further](#) by enabling social landlords in England to offer fixed-term (renewable) tenancies (usually for a minimum of five years) to new social tenants, with the Government advising that income, employment status, under-occupancy and behaviour could all be taken into account in [tenancy \(non\) renewal](#).

However, [only 15% of new social tenancies](#) were let on a fixed term basis by 2014/2015. Unhappy with this position, the 2015 Conservative Government under David Cameron passed further legislation, in the [Housing and Planning Act 2016](#), which will – when brought into force – make FTTs mandatory for the vast majority of new local authority tenants. Concessions made during its passage through Parliament mean that the maximum fixed term was raised to 10 years (from 5 years) for some groups, and to cover the period that a child is in school education (up to age 19). The May Government, however, [abandoned plans](#) to mandate income-related rents ('pay to stay') for local authority tenants. Plans to mandate FTTs on most new housing associations lets as well were shelved in light of an official reclassification of associations as 'public corporations'; though this reclassification has since [been reversed](#). While back in 2012 there were proposals to introduce probationary (but not fixed-term) tenancies in Scotland, this agenda was [not pursued in the end](#).



# Methods overview

## Introduction

This section outlines the methodological approach which underpinned the WelCond project and the methods used to generate the new data to inform our findings. The use of conditional welfare arrangements that combine elements of sanction and support in order to influence the behaviour of social welfare recipients is an established element within UK social security, social housing, criminal justice and immigration systems. Against this backdrop WelCond had three core aims. First, to develop an empirically and theoretically informed understanding of the role of welfare conditionality in promoting and sustaining behaviour change among a diversity of social welfare recipients *over time*. Second, to consider the particular circumstances in which the use of welfare conditionality may, or may not, be ethically justified. Third, to establish an original and comprehensive evidence base on the efficacy and ethicality of conditionality across a range of social policy fields and diverse groups of welfare service users.

## Research design: a qualitative approach

Essentially we were attempting to explore and understand a number of linked questions about the fairness, impacts and effects, intended or otherwise, of welfare interventions underpinned by and delivered according to a principle of welfare conditionality. To do this we used a range of appropriate qualitative methods (cf. eg, Ritchie et al. 2014; Mason, 2017). Initially, a comprehensive literature/data review alongside a scoping of theoretical and normative positions related to welfare conditionality and behaviour change was undertaken. This was informed by a series of international academic expert seminars and consultation workshops undertaken with practitioners and welfare service users undertaken early in the project. Following this we embarked on extensive qualitative fieldwork with three sets of respondents in order to generate new empirical data to inform our work. We chose to undertake our fieldwork in England and Scotland to allow for a comparison of how differing legislative frameworks and political approaches might impact on the implementation and effectiveness of welfare conditionality.

First, the team conducted **52 semi-structured interviews with policy stakeholders** (including policymakers, senior officers from government, service provider agencies, umbrella bodies and campaigning organisations). The aim was provide insight into the political and other ‘drivers’ underpinning and contesting conditional welfare initiatives at the national, regional and local levels. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. The majority were undertaken between November 2013 and September 2014 but a small number were undertaken at later dates across the life of the project as appropriate opportunities occurred. See figure 1 for a full list of policy stakeholder interviews.

We also convened **27 focus groups with frontline welfare practitioners**. Our intention was to include both those who implement conditionality policy in their face to face interactions with welfare service users (including work coaches, Work Programme staff, family intervention workers, street outreach workers, local authority housing officers, etc) and also those who play a role in supporting people subject to the various sanctions and mandatory support that welfare conditionality implies (including benefits rights advisers and staff from welfare advocacy organisations). However, following a decision by the DWP to veto the involvement of Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme employees we were unable to conduct focus groups with these staff groups. The purpose of the focus groups was to explore practitioners’ views about what should happen (ethically) and what they think would happen (in practice). In order to explore the interaction of normative and systems orientated processes in decisions related to sanction and support we used a ‘vignette’ (hypothetical scenario) methodology (Finch, 1987; Schoenberg and Ravdal, 2000) and presented a series of ‘typical cases’ of individuals or households subject to conditionality in each welfare area under investigation. The vignettes were used to trigger broader conversations about the range of normative and operational options drawn upon when frontline practitioners made their decisions. A total of 156 respondents took part in the focus groups which were conducted in late 2014 and throughout 2015 (see figure 3 for details). Discussions were routinely between ninety minutes and three hours’ duration.

At the heart of the project was a large (in total 1,082 interviews were undertaken), **qualitative longitudinal**



**Figure 1: Policy stakeholder interviews**

Number	Agreed descriptor
PS1	Managing director, national social housing representative organisation
PS2a	Senior policy manager, community safety, Scottish government
PS2b	Senior policy manager, social housing services, Scottish government
PS3	Senior policy officer, complex needs charity
PS4	Former government minister
PS5	Spokesperson for network of migrant support organisations
PS6	Labour MP
PS7	Integration service manager
PS8	Legal advisor
PS9	Representative of Scottish national refugee organisation
PS10	Senior policy officer
PS11	Co-ordinator, regional rights organisation
PS12	Policy and communications manager, UK disability organisation
PS13	Senior representative, social housing sector, Scotland
PS14	Senior representative, local government, Scotland
PS16	Senior representative, social housing sector, Scotland
PS17	Senior statutory sector representative, Scotland
PS18	Senior housing key informant
PS19a	Offender campaigning organisation
PS19b	Offender campaigning organisation
PS20	Government department
PS21	Government department
PS22	Housing campaigning organisation
PS23a	Offender campaigning organisation
PS23b	Offender campaigning organisation
PS23c	Offender campaigning organisation
PS24	Head, NGO offending

Number	Agreed descriptor
PS25	Senior representative, homelessness charity
PS26	Senior representative, lone parent charity
PS27	Senior representative, homelessness umbrella agency
PS28a	Senior representative, homelessness campaigning organisation
PS28b	Senior representative, homelessness campaigning organisation
PS29	Senior representative, homelessness charity
PS30	Senior representative, homelessness campaigning organisation
PS31	Senior representative, lone parent campaigning organisation
PS32	Senior representative, children's charity
PS33	Senior representative, social housing sector, UK
PS34	Senior civil servant
PS35	Senior representative, homelessness umbrella agency
PS36	Senior representative, homelessness charity
PS37	Senior representative, homelessness umbrella agency
PS38	Senior housing association stakeholder, south of England
PS39	Senior representative, lone parent charity
PS40	Community-based housing association
PS41a	Communities and neighbourhoods manager, regional housing association
PS41b	Head of tenancy services, regional housing association
PS42	UK-wide welfare rights agency policy officer
PS43a	Faith-based charity campaigner
PS43b	Faith-based charity campaigner
PS44	Senior policy stakeholder
PS45	Private work programme provider, CEO
PS46	Project manager, voluntary sector

**panel study undertaken with a diversity of welfare service users (WSUs) subject to welfare conditionality.**

Qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) is a valuable methodological approach for understanding processes of behaviour change and assessing whether (and if so how), it may be sustained over time. QLR attempts to describe changes that may be occurring, consider how they arise, and explain how and why there may be diverse outcomes for different members of a sampled population (Lewis, 2003; Saldana, 2003; Neale, 2018). As Corden and Millar (2007:529) explain:

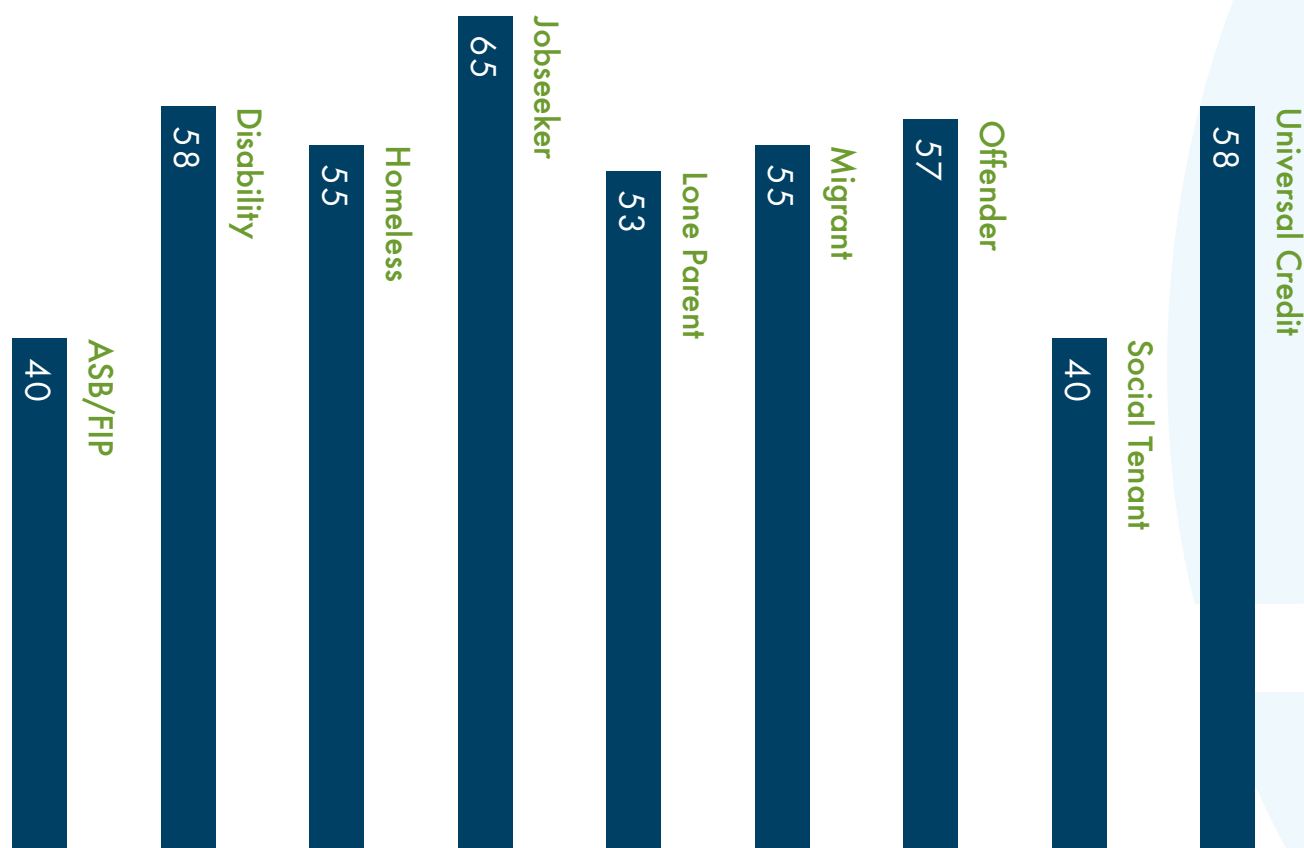
*Having people look back over time can provide insight into how they perceive and explain their actions, given the opportunity to discuss and reflect. Following people forward over time provides an opportunity to explore how and why people make the individual choices that add up to particular cumulative trajectories, and more specifically to understand the ways in which people respond to and use social and welfare services.*

We chose to use qualitative longitudinal techniques to

enable the development of a dynamic understanding of the impacts and effects of welfare conditionality that was firmly grounded in the experiences of those people who were subject to welfare conditionality. This qualitative longitudinal dimension enabled an understanding of how, over time, welfare recipients' choices and actions may potentially be influenced by a number of factors such as gender, ethnicity, disability, changes in personal and family circumstance (Millar, 2007) and, importantly, the application of specific sanction or support initiatives.

Accordingly the repeat QL sample consisted of nine different groups (panels) of WSUs subject to varying types and degrees of welfare conditionality. These were recipients of working age social security benefits (jobseekers, lone parents, disabled people, Universal Credit, both in- and out-of-work claimants), homeless people, social tenants, individuals/families subject to anti-social behaviour orders/family intervention projects, offenders and migrants. Suitable respondents were purposively sampled according to a range of appropriate criteria pertinent to each group under consideration.

**Figure 2: Primary sampling characteristic at wave a**



**Figure 3: Focus groups with policy practitioners**

Policy area	Location	Number of participants
ASB	Glasgow	2
ASB	Bristol	5
Offending	Glasgow	4
Universal Credit	Inverness	8
Social housing	Bristol	5
Social housing	London	7
Social housing	London	11
Social housing	Glasgow	12
Offending	Sheffield	2
Disability	Sheffield	2
Disability	Sheffield	3
Jobseeking	Sheffield	4
Migrants	Bristol	6
Jobseeking	Sheffield	5
ASB	Perth	18
Disability	Bristol	4
Universal Credit	Bath	8
Lone Parents	Sheffield	6
Universal Credit	Manchester	10
Migrants	Peterborough	4
Disability	Peterborough	3
Homelessness	London	7
Homelessness	London	3
Homelessness	London	5
Homelessness	London	5
Homelessness	Edinburgh	3
Homelessness	Glasgow	4

For example, four sampling criteria were used for the migrant cohort. First, respondents had to meet the United Nations broad definition of a migrant: ‘A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence’ (UN, 2013). Second, that they be migrant adults from the European Economic Area or Third Country Nationals with positive outcomes to their asylum claims (for example, granted Refugee Status, Discretionary Leave to Remain, Humanitarian Protection Status or Indefinite Leave to Remain). Third, be individuals who had experience of conditional welfare benefits or interventions. Fourth, had not been granted British Citizenship at the time of initial interview.

The diversity of groups sampled helped to ensure that differences according to gender, ethnicity and disability could be captured and the significance and dynamics of such factors explored.

Welfare service users were interviewed up to three times at on average 12-month intervals across a two year period. Retention rates between each wave were approximately 70%. That is, of the 481 people interviewed at wave a, we were able to interview 339 again at wave b and 262 once again at wave c (see figure 2 for groups). The repeat interviews took place between 2014 and 2017 and typically lasted from forty to ninety minutes. They were undertaken in 11 locations in England and Scotland: Bath, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, London, Manchester, Peterborough, Salford, Sheffield, and Warrington. These sites were chosen to ensure a reasonable geographic spread across the two nations and to help enable access to appropriate WSU respondents through the pre-existing research networks of team members. Bath, Inverness and Warrington were added following the introduction of Universal Credit in 2013 as these, alongside Greater Manchester, were locations chosen as initial Universal Credit pilots.

## Ethical considerations and data handling/analysis

Two principles, informed consent and anonymity, underpinned the fieldwork. Before each interview, individuals were provided with an information sheet, given the opportunity to ask questions and made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Written consent forms were used to

reiterate understandings of consent. Issues relating to consent were revisited with individual WSUs prior to each wave of interview. Interpreters and translated materials were made available as required. Interviews were conducted in places convenient for respondents including workplaces, cafés, community/support agency offices and homes. The overwhelming majority of interviews were conducted face to face with a small number conducted over the phone. Welfare service users who participated in the fieldwork received a £20 shopping voucher after each interview/consultation event as a thank you for their time. All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and English language transcripts produced. Appropriate anonymised code numbers or agreed identifiers were assigned to each transcript, such as for WSU-BR-LS-012a.<sup>2</sup>

The policy stakeholder and focus group interviews were analysed using cross sectional thematic code and retrieve methods (Mason, 2017; Ritchie et al., 2014), grid analysis (Knodel, 1993). A multi-dimensional approach to analysis of the longitudinal panel study data variously enabled: cross-sectional analysis, ie, looking at individual

cases across the sample at each particular wave of data collection; repeat cross-sectional analysis, looking for change in individual cases between particular points of time and the generation of longitudinal case narratives, to explore how, and for whom, behaviour change occurred (or not) across the time period studied (rf. Holland et al., 2006). The data was also analysed thematically both longitudinally and at each wave/time point, to explore key issues within individual cases and allow group comparisons to consider, commonality and difference between groups (Lewis, 2007).

A QL panel study of the size and complexity undertaken by WelCond generates vast amounts of data. In order to enable consistent longitudinal analysis across the different respondents and groups within the panel study, a common coding schema was developed for application across all sampled groups and the full data set was summarised using a framework matrix approach and QSR NVivo software (Lewis, 2007). This was complemented by additional, more ‘bottom up’ thematic analysis, undertaken by the particular research team assigned to each policy area according to their specific expertise.

**Figure 4: Overview of sample wave a: key characteristics**



<sup>2</sup> This identifies: type of respondent eg welfare service user (WSU), location of the interview (BR = Bristol) , the interviewer and the wave of interview if appropriate.

# Findings

## Effectiveness: welfare conditionality and movements from welfare to work

Welfare conditionality within the social security system was largely ineffective in moving respondents into employment or ensuring progression when in the paid labour market. Notably, stasis – a lack of significant, sustained change in employment status – was the most common outcome among those who took part in repeat interviews. Despite ongoing and often repeated applications for work, many respondents only managed to secure sporadic employment at various points within the two year period of the longitudinal interviews. Recurrent movements between one short-term, low-paid, insecure job and another; interspersed with periods when people returned to unemployment or incapacity benefits, as contracts ended or illness/impairment intervened, were the most typical pattern.

**“ [At first interview]... [worked for] three weeks. It was part-time temporary work for over Christmas... I keep applying and I'm just unlucky at the moment... [At second interview]... I worked at [retailer] over the Christmas period this year... I keep looking for jobs... I've even applied to work on the bins... [At third interview]... I started work last year. I was in work for just under three months and I ended up with stress-induced blackouts... I had an interview last Thursday, although I didn't get the job.”**

(UC RECIPIENT, MALE, ENGLAND, WAVES A-C)

**“ [At second interview] Got employment with an old friend of mine... seasonal work from April to October... [At third interview] I'm out of work right now; that's due to two things, an accident and infection but I'm starting to look again for work on Monday.”**

(UC RECIPIENT, MALE, SCOTLAND, WAVES B-C)

Movements into sustained employment and progression within the workplace were very rare. In the exceptional cases where welfare conditionality played an important role in triggering a positive employment trajectory, appropriate, personalised, employment-focused support rather than sanctions can be clearly identified as of fundamental importance.

**“ Being signed up with that [Work Programme provider] was a blessing in disguise... Initially, I just thought, oh, Jobcentre's just trying to get rid of me... I felt listened to, I felt assisted... in my journey to get a job, and yet the sanctions were a total opposite, so definitely the support was much appreciated, was more useful... It got me the job.”**

(MIGRANT, FEMALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

Respondents commonly regarded Jobcentres and Work Programme (WP) providers as being primarily focused on ensuring compliance with the mandatory benefit claim conditions rather than helping people into work. Pressure to achieve more demanding job application/work search requirements coupled with recipients' strong desire to avoid the punitive effects of a sanction resulted in people applying for jobs they had no realistic chance of getting. Intensified welfare conditionality therefore encouraged a culture of counterproductive compliance and futile behaviour that got in the way of more effective attempts to secure employment.

**“ My job was solely to prove to that woman [referring to Work Coach] that I had applied for so many jobs, and that was it... whatever jobs were available. Whether they were suitable for me, whether I was suitable for them, whatever, it didn't matter.”**

(UC RECIPIENT, MALE, ENGLAND, WAVE B)

**“ All they cared about was, 'Make sure you've got x amount of applications that you've applied for, that you can prove you've applied for, and that you've put it on Universal Jobmatch'. ”**

(OFFENDER, MALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

A minority learned the 'rules of the game' (Offender, Female, England, wave a) and altered their behaviour accordingly to become superficially compliant with compulsory work-related requirements whilst moving no closer to work. Others, particularly those who faced additional vulnerabilities such as homelessness and alcohol or drug dependency issues, reacted to the inherent hassle and compulsion of conditionality by withdrawing from the social security system altogether; in some cases triggering a move into survival crime.



**“Drug dealing. That’s what I did... That sanction... turned me to crime and making my money. And then after that I was making that much money I didn’t need their [benefit] money.”**

(HOMELESS MAN, SCOTLAND, WAVE C)

Low paid workers who resented being subject to ‘in work’ conditionality regularly reacted in a similar fashion by relinquishing the housing-related and low wage supplements available through UC to avoid the necessity of compulsory additional job searches and attendance at work focused interviews.

**“Rang them up to say that I couldn’t come in because I was working full time. So they said that was all right. Then I got a letter saying I’d missed my interview and they’ve taken me off Universal Credit. So I thought, you know what, just stuff you. I can’t be bothered with them anymore. Mostly I’ve struggled because I just can’t be doing with them. Just going in there for them to look down at you... Basically, I’m living off 20 hours for the past couple of months and I’m paying full rent.”**

(UC RECIPIENT, FEMALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

For a number of people, welfare conditionality triggered or exacerbated existing illnesses and impairments and decreased the likelihood of future return to work.

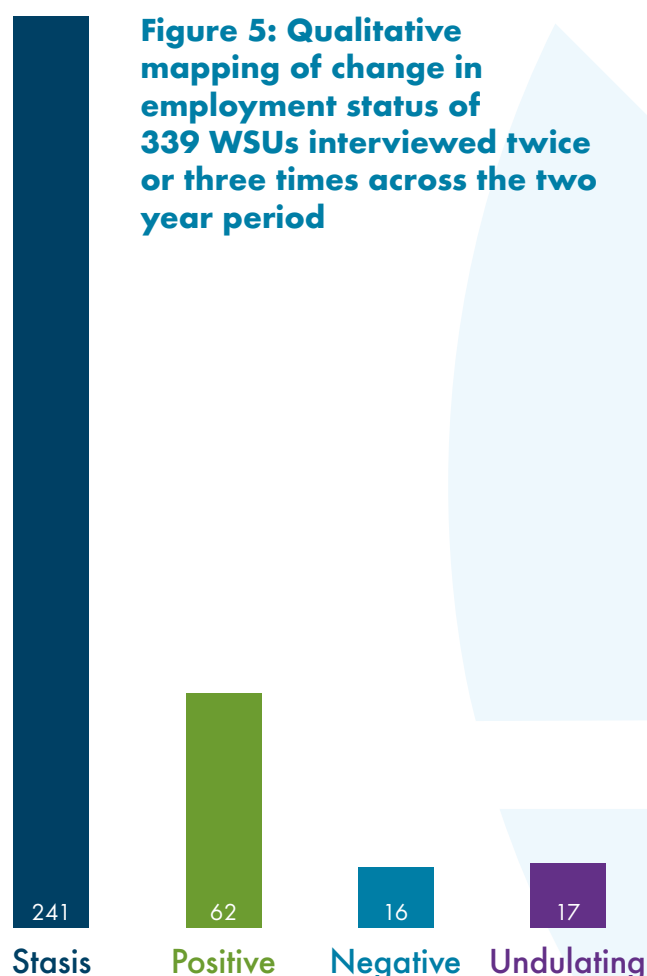
**“[At first interview] I went to hospital... The money doesn’t come because there’s something gone wrong on your claim, so you’ve got another month to wait... all these sort of like people in my life... it’s just overwhelming me... it’s making matters worse... [At second interview] ‘[Work Coach] I don’t want to phone you. I can see how ill you are’. I’m not fit to work then why am I talking to a job coach? It doesn’t make sense... [At third interview] Gradually got worse, and with my anxiety and depression, the stress of this Universal Credit, the stress of trying to get jobs, and just trying to function within a flat, I ran off to the woods at one point.”**

(UC RECIPIENT, MALE, ENGLAND, WAVES A-C)

## The efficacy of welfare conditionality in tackling anti-social and problematic behaviour

Outside the social security system conditionality is also a key element of interventions and legal/quasi-legal mechanisms which aim to tackle anti-social and problematic behaviour and reduce offending, for example via FIPs, enforcement approaches to combat rough sleeping and begging, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, etc. Analysis of repeat interviews with respondents recruited into the ASB/FIP, offenders and homeless people groups, many of whom simultaneously faced multiple difficulties (such as mental/physical health issues, alcohol or drug dependency, insecure accommodation), evidences a

**Figure 5: Qualitative mapping of change in employment status of 339 WSUs interviewed twice or three times across the two year period**



## CASE STUDY: Harry – multiple sanctions and disengagement

Harry is in his forties and has depression. We spoke to him on two occasions with a two-year interval between discussions. He had been in receipt of Income Support for a number of years but following a Work Capability Assessment for ESA was found fit for work and placed on Jobseeker's Allowance. He was attempting to apply for ESA again with the help of a doctor. At our first interview he spoke of how he was sleeping rough after a benefit sanction led to rent arrears and subsequent eviction. He had not received any social security benefits for several months due to a six month benefit sanction applied for missing Work Programme appointments. He had been informed he did not qualify for hardship payments.

**“I was on income support, then they decided I wasn't sick or whatever so they took me off income support, put me on jobseekers. Then that all went wrong and I got sanctioned and then I got made homeless... I couldn't pay the rent because I was sanctioned... you can actually claim housing benefit without jobseekers, but then no-one tells you that. So then my rent ended up backing up and because my head was all over the place I just couldn't deal with it... They made me go to a Work Programme... You go in, they give you a nice sales pitch about all the wonderful things they're going to do and then say 'Right, off you go, go find a job' and that's basically it... I got sanctioned because I missed appointments with them.”**

(HARRY, WAVE A)

Told if he returned to the WP they might lift the sanction he went back to Job Club but again missed some appointments because, '[I] lost interest then because you've got no money and I have to spend most of my time running around trying to find something to eat.'

**“Sanctions only hurt. There's no good in them. I know they might wheel the odd person on the BBC and say 'Look this man if it wasn't for sanctions', but the reality is no they're just harmful, they just hurt. And support, are we talking governmental support?... like I say the only real support is charity.”**

(HARRY, WAVE A)

At our second interview 24 months later, having lost a tenancy in the interim because of a further benefit sanction, he was back rough sleeping. Faced with repeated and escalating benefit sanctions Harry had disengaged from the social security system to avoid the stress that meeting the conditions of his claim triggered which, in turn, exacerbated his depression.

**“I just can't be arsed with the stress for £70 a week. It's just not worth it. Every time you go in, you're on hooks, like, what's going to happen now?... What's next? Then they send you on stupid courses... I don't claim benefits at the moment. I just don't want to know. Too much of an headache. You know, you never know from one week to the next whether you're getting paid and it's just proper stress... it's pointless. 'Do it. If you don't, you're sanctioned.' Things like that. It's nuts! So, yes, I just, I don't sign on anymore... The only thing it has done is make it more difficult basically. They say, like, it encourages people to go to look for work. No, it doesn't.”**

(HARRY, WAVE B)

At our second interview he remained destitute and reliant on charitable provision for food and peace of mind.

**“I can be quite lucky sometimes. Like I say, I get my breakfast at [homeless charity]. I work here all day and lunch here. Evenings, there's different places dotted about where you can get something to eat... The only place you get any kind of help are charities. Everywhere else is a waste of time... [Doing voluntary work] it's just helping my state of mind really more than anything.”**

(HARRY, WAVE B)



mixed picture in respect of the effectiveness of such interventions in changing behaviour.

During the period of the study, positive and significant behaviour change (including reductions in ASB and school truancy, better crisis management, improved parenting and enhanced self-confidence and health) were evidenced by the majority of respondents in the ASB/FIPs group; who routinely acknowledged a need for interventions to tackle ASB including their own.

**“We’ve achieved so much and I don’t think I would have got through it without them [project workers] coming and helping, I don’t know where I would have been if I didn’t get the help that I did get. Things could have come out a lot worse.”**

(FEMALE, SUBJECT TO FIP, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

The intensive, holistic and personalised support made available through FIPs was directly linked to positive changes in behaviour and circumstances. However, the gains achieved were often subsequently undermined by welfare conditionality within a benefit system built around depersonalised sanctions and lacking support.

The use of enforcement measures did prompt some homeless people to discontinue harmful behaviours and/or engage with support. However, for others, enforcement displaced rough sleeping, begging and street drinking and caused those affected to disengage from support; and/or strengthened their resolve to continue participating in street culture.

**“We’ve all worked with people who it has helped... there’s been people who have been stopped from street drinking, from begging, and it has helped them in terms of their actual health and lifestyle that they go on to achieve.”**

(FRONTLINE PRACTITIONER, HOMELESSNESS CHARITY)

**“I was begging in those days so it was ‘Get out of [borough] or we’ll give you an ASBO... I just moved to the other side of the water. I didn’t go far... I just moved area and when the same thing happened again just moved area.”**

(HOMELESS MAN, ENGLAND, WAVE A)

Among respondents dealing with complex life issues such as homelessness, substance misuse and involvement in street cultures, behaviour change was challenging and positive progress was rarely linear. Periods of improvement were often followed by regression into past routines. For some, conditionality and the threat or experience of enforcement measures

were influential in decisions to discontinue problematic behaviour and/or engage more constructively with offers of support.

**“It was [helpful] in a way, yes. I think it was because it made me realise the way I was doing things wasn’t right because you’ve got to have a bit more respect for your neighbours.”**

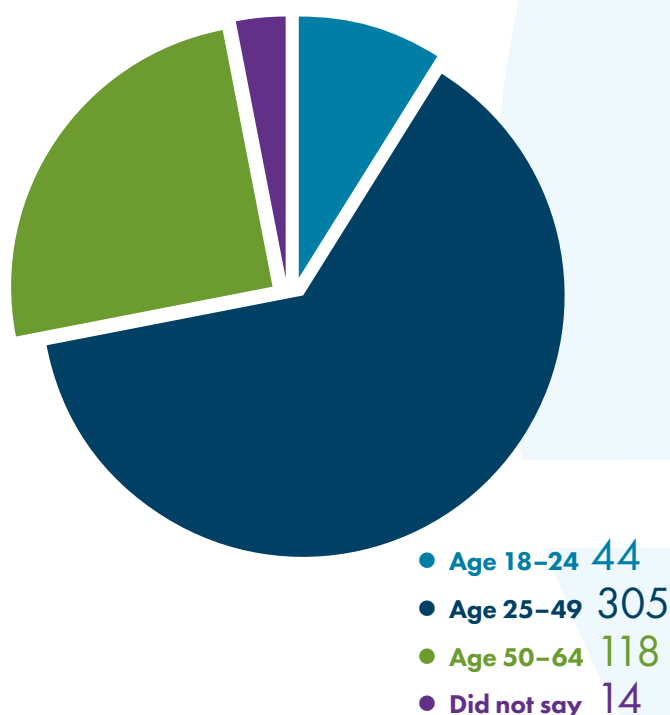
(MALE, ENGLAND, SUBJECT TO ASBO, WAVE B)

However, sustained behaviour change was more likely to be founded upon respondents accessing stable accommodation and an array of support to deal with their vulnerabilities (such as poor health, addiction and homelessness). For others positive change was catalysed, at least in part, by personal crises such as deterioration in health or the feeling of having reached ‘rock bottom’. Individual decisions to make a step change in lifestyle, which on occasions incurred personal sacrifices, were highly significant in triggering and sustaining positive behaviour change. Rather than compulsion, the combination of personal commitment and the availability of appropriate support were important factors in the long-term cessation of offending or ASB.

**“I had to get rid of my wife, had to get rid of all my friends and start again.”**

(OFFENDER, MALE, SCOTLAND, WAVE C)

**Figure 6: Welfare service user respondents by age (total 481)**





## CASE STUDY: Kate – Anti-social Behaviour Order

Kate lives alone. She has mental health problems and at our first interview had some temporary physical health problems. She is on regular medication. She receives support from her mother who is her main carer, as well as from a psychiatrist and psychologist, and sees a community safety worker. She had support around self-harming and drug use in the past but feels it was inadequate. She has been homeless in the past.

Kate is a long term offender, stating she was charged as a child and has had several offences since. She states she has not engaged in ASB or criminal activity for nine years. She states she received an ASBO for 'terrorising people' and received an Acceptable Behaviour Contract which she breached, then another ASBO. The last ASBO was lifted many years ago but she is unsure why.

Kate reflected on past experiences of remand, prison and ASB interventions. She states when she was younger she ignored the consequences of her actions but now sees her mistakes and she decided in prison to change her life. She stopped seeing friends who were a bad influence and realised that her behaviour was contributing to her mother's stress and ill health. She had conflicting views on the effectiveness of the ASBO. At one point in the interview she felt the ASBOs did not change behaviour and did not agree they should have been applied and that at the time she didn't take much notice: *'It didn't help me because I was always breaching it, so it's just basically sitting there, it's not doing anything.'*

However, she also identified positive changes in her behaviour as a result of the ASBO: *'Positive in a way because it's changed me. I don't do it as much now as I used to or anything like that.'*

In principle she believes that ASBOs are reasonable (including banning people from areas). However, in her particular case she felt that what was needed was greater support: *'My behaviour was really bad but maybe if I got support around that then maybe instead of just throwing me in prison all the time then giving me the help.'*

At the time of the first interview she hoped to find work in the future supporting young people but felt her criminal convictions posed a barrier to paid work. By the second interview she hoped to do some voluntary work.

*Names have been changed*



***“[I] just got to the point where I was sick of it. It's shite, it's shit life, horrible, it's a nightmare, looking back, yes, I don't know, I just wanted out of it, me, to be honest.”***

**(HOMELESS MAN, ENGLAND, WAVE C)**

Within the criminal justice system, significant levels of recidivism highlight the limited success of sanctions based regimes in triggering positive behavioural change among offenders. Given this, the effectiveness of their extension within the social security system is further brought into question.

## Conditionality, social housing and behaviour change

There is little evidence that welfare conditionality within social housing (for example, the use of fixed term or probationary tenancies linked to behavioural requirements) was effective in changing the behaviour of social tenants other than in relatively minor ways (such as, some may be less likely to invest in home improvements). There was very little support for the notion that renewal of tenancies should be linked to job search or volunteering activities.

**“I’m just the same... it hasn’t changed my behaviour to think I’ve got to behave a certain way because I don’t want my tenancy to be taken over.”**

(SOCIAL TENANT, LONE PARENT, FEMALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

Routinely, tenants only had a vague understanding of the grounds upon which their fixed-term tenancies could potentially be terminated. The majority were only mildly anxious about their tenancy status. However, for a minority, mainly older tenants, those with disability or health issues or children, the lack of an open-ended tenancy was a cause of considerable distress.

**“[With an open-ended tenancy] you know you have a place to be and it’s for life... Psychologically... I have my home, I’m here, unless something drastically – unless I can’t pay my rent or anything, no one is going to make me move... when you’re younger, you can see yourself moving... but as you get older, you need to be settled. Housing, a roof on top of your head, that should be something that really an older person doesn’t have to worry about.”**

(SOCIAL TENANT, FEMALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

## Benefit sanctions

Benefit sanctions were ineffective in moving people nearer or into paid employment. They were routinely experienced as punitive and more likely to undermine the likelihood of engagement or advancement in paid work. In certain cases the experience of a benefit sanction led to individuals disengaging from the social security system.

**“[Sanctions] didn’t encourage me to do anything. Discouraged me... I don’t think it really was positive or it’s not designed to be, is it? It’s a punishment, that’s what it is.”**

(DISABLED MAN, ENGLAND, WAVE B)

**“I said to him [Work Coach], ‘I’m not going to argue with you and I’m trying my best,’... and with that I left the Jobcentre and I’ve not returned.”**

(UC RECIPIENT, MALE, SCOTLAND, WAVE B)

It was extremely rare, indeed exceptional, for a respondent to report that the application of a benefit sanction helped trigger a movement into paid work. The standout example was a person, who was initially extremely angry and impoverished by a benefit sanction,

but who subsequently commented about it having a positive employment related impact.

**“[At first interview] I got sanctioned by the Jobcentre because I didn’t have a note from the hospital stating that I was in hospital after trying to take my life. They’re supposed to help people get work, but they don’t... [At third interview] Gave me the kick up the arse I needed to get a job... it made me more determined in finding a job working my arse off and being a better person than what the Jobcentre made me out to be.”**

(UC RECIPIENT, MALE, ENGLAND, WAVES A-C)

The application of benefit sanctions universally triggered a range of profoundly negative outcomes, including increased debt, poverty and reliance on charitable providers and informal support networks in order to meet basic needs.

**“[My gas and electric] fell into that much arrears... I was without heating for ages... I pawned everything I had... You’re literally going, ‘Do I eat or do I have light?’”**

(LONE PARENT, FEMALE, SCOTLAND, WAVE A)

Respondents also frequently spoke of benefit sanctions, and their possible future application, exacerbating existing physical and mental illnesses and triggering high levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

**“[Sanction] took me further down the depression route... suicidal thoughts... I’d rather starve than deal with this.”**

(HOMELESS WOMAN, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

**“I sunk into depression really because it felt all so stacked against me.”**

(DISABLED WOMAN, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

**“‘Do you have any jobs? Do you have anything?’... I can’t concentrate... I think like a crazy person. I can’t do anything. I can’t seem to quieten the madness.”**

(FEMALE JOBSEEKER, SCOTLAND, WAVE A)

Evidence suggests that benefit sanctions were often triggered for relatively minor transgressions such as being a couple of minutes late for a Jobcentre Plus appointment. On occasions benefit sanctions were clearly inappropriately applied in spite of an individual’s best efforts to avoid them.

**“I had an appointment with them, I phoned them saying that I’ve got a problem... my brother who died in [location] and I’m there it’s the burial ceremony, you understand?... They said, ‘No don’t worry, if you come back, just call us back’, and then ten days, I phoned them back... They say, no, they have to send it to the decision board to see and then they send me a letter after saying that I have to be sanctioned... that wasn’t human.”**

(MIGRANT, FEMALE, ENGLAND, UC RECIPIENT, WAVE C)

## Support

Only a minority stated the mandatory support they received from Jobcentre Plus was enabling and of practical use in helping them find or maintain work. One person outlined how the training he had been sent on was instrumental in moving into employment. Another detailed how they had got a job within a day of phoning an employer listed on the Universal Jobmatch system. Several working on flexible contracts also commented that monthly variable UC payments were working well and that not having to constantly sign on and off benefit when their working week exceeded 16 hours (as was the case under JSA rules), was beneficial.

**“[UC] got me the card, I did the training, and I did the test, and that was all free. Normally it would cost quite a bit of money to do all of that... and it’s got me into work... Literally, on the day after I received that card I was in work.”**

(UC RECIPIENT, MALE ENGLAND, WAVE B)

However, the majority of respondents experienced their interactions with Work Coaches/advisers as being of limited use and/or coercive rather than supportive. The pressure to constantly search and apply for jobs, under threat of benefit sanction, yielded few positive work outcomes for many. Across all three waves of repeat interview the dominant view was that the provision of individualised support was largely lost in a process dominated by compliance monitoring. Few participants found the Universal Jobmatch website useful with complaints of out-of-date job listings, limited functionality or surveillance commonplace.

**“Big brother is watching you! You’re getting spied on.”**

(FEMALE, JOB SEEKER, SCOTLAND, WAVE A)

**“What helped me get a job had nothing to do with the jobcentre.”**

(MIGRANT, FEMALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

Additionally, most respondents did not think that the Claimant Commitment was explained adequately to them at their initial meeting. Discussions between Work Coaches and clients concerning conditions attached to claims were often cursory, with the process being routinely described by respondents as dominated by compulsion rather than negotiation.

**“Yes, you had to sign it at the end but if you don’t sign it you don’t get your money. So you’ve got a choice, there is a choice... agree to this or bugger off, you’re not getting money.”**

(UC RECIPIENT, MALE, SCOTLAND WAVE A)

‘Easements’ or flexibilities are another important element built into the current benefit system. These are intended to enable Work Coaches to suspend or reduce the job search and work related conditions attached to an individual’s benefit claim depending on their particular circumstances (for example, homelessness, lone parenthood, sickness). Easements should be discussed as part of the Claimant Commitment process. However, they are not currently being routinely discussed and/or appropriately implemented in all cases.

**“They had an appointment for me at 3 o’clock and it was for an hour. I said ‘I can’t fulfil it; I’ve got a child’. ‘Oh, well, if you don’t come you won’t have your benefit’.”**

(LONE PARENT, FEMALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

Much of the compulsory training on offer from Work Programme providers was condemned as being too generic, of poor quality and of limited use in improving people’s skills or enhancing future movements into work. Provision was regularly neither intensive or personally tailored, nor vocational enough to help people overcome the barriers they faced when trying to (re)engage with paid employment.

**“You need more different support, and proper training in like bricklaying or something... not like what they do, like you go in a room and you do a CV.”**

(OFFENDER, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

**“A quiz, nothing to do with work... these teasers that you get in crackers... [or] ‘Right, you two, go on there and do some jobs.’ So we got on the computers... When you got there it was never, ‘Right, today we’re going to do.’ It was a question of ‘Oh my God, what am I going to do with these people’. ”**

(DISABLED WOMAN, ENGLAND, WAVE B)

Variations in how the mandatory support on offer was delivered by individual Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme staff were also significant in determining its effectiveness in triggering entry into employment. Similarly, discretion in how welfare conditionality is operationalised by individual staff members in their face-to-face dealings with benefit recipients was also an important factor in enabling even the most marginalised of people to take the first steps towards more fulfilling lives.

**“[Of the Jobcentre adviser] After I’d lost everything I had to then sign on again. My adviser this time was absolutely fantastic. I couldn’t praise him up enough... I explained my situation. I said ‘look I’m a drug addict and I’m doing my best to get clean. I’m in recovery’ and he was just really supportive. He wasn’t on my case. He was encouraging; brilliant... He hasn’t just let me get away with it. He’s been ‘What about this training course? Go for that...’ He could have sanctioned me on numerous occasions. ”**

(DISABLED MAN, JSA/ESA RECIPIENT, ENGLAND, WAVE A)

With a previous long-term history of work, in late middle age, this respondent became addicted to drugs. His life entered into a downward spiral, he became homeless and lost his business and family. At his first wave interview he recounted how his recovery had been enabled by both the positive support of his particular Jobcentre Plus Work Coach (who had also advised and facilitated a move from JSA to ESA), alongside the non-statutory support offered by two homelessness organisations that had helped him overcome his addiction and then offered him voluntary work. At his third wave interview he was living independently and had just started a permanent job in another city. Within conditional welfare interventions, personalised packages of support, rather than punitive sanctions, are the essential component required to initiate and sustain positive behaviour change.

## CASE STUDY: Peter – turning to survival crime

Peter had rarely worked and described himself as a ‘commercial burglar’. *‘All my family... they’ve all worked on building sites... but it just wasn’t for me at the time – the money was better in criminality.’* He was last released from prison four years prior to our first interview. At this time he was a recovering drug addict living in a hostel and claiming ESA (Work Related Activity Group). He supplemented benefit income by occasionally undertaking informal work for a relative: *‘[He’s] a painter and decorator, so I get a lot of work with him... like £70 a day.’*

Prior to our second meeting Peter had incurred a benefit sanction for failing to attend a Work Programme appointment despite claiming to have phoned in advance to explain that he had to take his pet dog to the vet. He felt particularly aggrieved because he had volunteered to take part in the Programme: *‘I put myself out there to get work and I am getting punished for it.’* He felt depressed and indicated that he might use drugs again despite being ‘clean’ for over three years. Family support was limited. He hinted that he was considering resorting to ‘survival crime’. *‘I was going to walk around to a friend of mine who’s a criminal and borrow some money but then where does that put me? It puts me in their pocket.’*

At our final interview Peter admitted that he had briefly resumed criminal activities to cope with the loss of benefits. *‘I had to go and do things I didn’t want to do... because 13 weeks with no money and food vouchers... it’s commercial burglaries basically.’* Despite this he was still ‘clean’; had re-established contact with his mother and had undertaken a number of short courses at a homelessness charity. He ascribed his stabilisation to the following: *‘There have been lots of little things like I said, my dog, my ex, my relationship with my mother and my kids... This is why I’m doing what I’m doing.’* He has also had to distance himself from the criminal sub-culture. *‘They’re all characters. I’ve grown up with them, but at the same time I’ve been able to dissociate myself.’*





## Ethical debates

In principle, the majority of policy stakeholders, practitioners and welfare service users who took part in the interviews and focus groups that underpin this study are broadly supportive of welfare rights being linked to certain specified individual responsibilities.

**“If you’re asking for something you’ve got to do something back in return. That’s just normal life – you don’t get owt for nowt.”**

(DISABLED WOMAN, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

Simultaneously, however, many are much more critical of the way in which welfare conditionality within the UK welfare state has been enacted and expanded. The most commonly held view was that the balance between sanctions and support was out of kilter.

**“They’re looking for excuses to sanction you rather than give you a little bit of support.”**

(OFFENDER, MALE, SCOTLAND, WAVE C)

**“Telling people, ‘I’m going to sanction you because you haven’t done your job search properly, go away’. It’s not like, ‘I’m sanctioning you because you haven’t done your job search properly. This is how you’re meant to do it. This is what I want you to do. Do you need any support in place?’”**

(MALE JOBSEEKER, ENGLAND, WAVE B)

Many believed the relatively recent expansions and intensification of conditionality within the social security system to encompass: many disabled people (2007); low paid workers in receipt of in work benefits under UC (2013); and increasing numbers of lone parents with

## CASE STUDY: Joy – supported into work

Joy entered the UK as an asylum seeker and following the granting of refugee status quickly found employment before being made redundant and claiming JSA.

In her first interview she told us about being sent by Jobcentre Plus on a compulsory English language course despite migrating from an English speaking country of origin and speaking fluent English. Then she was told she had to attend further mandatory training on job searching and CV preparation, again under threat of benefit sanction for non-compliance.

**“I have to put the Jobcentre first before anything else... I’ve got this online diary ...whereby every single day I have to write out my activity history and say today I did this, this, this, this... it’s just**

**too much of a commitment, energy being directed to the wrong area rather than looking for a job and also getting a job.”**

She was feeling pressurised and disillusioned with how the conditionality inherent within the benefit system actually deflected her from meaningful job search and her ultimate goal of employment.

When we next interviewed her she was happy and excited to be working full-time. This was directly as a result of being referred by Jobcentre Plus (about five months after initially signing on), to a Work Programme provider and, more importantly, a personal adviser.

**“[WP provider]... help me with positions that I wasn’t aware of... I was never under pressure like at the Jobcentre... I felt really comfortable not just with the organisation but with the individual that I was allocated to assist me... I had an interview... I got the job... It’s been going great.”**

At her final interview she remained employed with the same company, who described her as an ideal and committed employee.

It is important to note that Joy’s case and employment trajectory is the exception rather than the norm. Across the study, such positive examples of mandatory training acting as effective triggers to job entry, progression and sustainable paid work are atypical.



children aged three or four (2017) to be unjust. Applying behavioural requirements to those who were incapable of work because of impairments, or who had sole caring responsibilities for young children, or who were already meeting their responsibility to work by engaging in part-time, low paid employment, was often seen as inappropriate and unjustifiable.

**“[Sanctions are fair] where somebody who has no interest in getting a job and doesn’t make any effort to get a job... But I must say that they should never ever, ever, sanction a parent, because who are they hurting when they do that? It’s not the person that they want to get a job; it’s the children.”**

(LONE PARENT, MALE, SCOTLAND, WAVE C)

**“Some people are not well enough to work and they shouldn’t be forced into taking part in things that aren’t good for them. But I think it should be up to the individual; if people want to work they should be given the support.”**

(DISABLED MAN, SCOTLAND, WAVE B)

Additionally, European Economic Area (EEA) nationals believed the recent restrictions (2014) on their benefit rights were discriminatory and unfair. They defended their claims on the basis of both EU citizenship and prior contribution through paid work.

**“I’ve been here for 23 years and what happened... end of August, I received a letter from the DWP to say I’m not entitled to housing benefit, I’m not entitled to anything because I’m just passing by, you know, they took all my rights away.”**

(EEA MIGRANT, MALE, SCOTLAND, WAVE A)

Furthermore, the majority of social housing tenants also disapproved of the prospect that people’s fixed-term tenancies could be terminated on the grounds of a rise in income, and only a small minority saw the idea of income related rents in social housing (sometimes called ‘pay to stay’) as fair.

**“I think there should be more social housing, because if you work very hard and to better yourself, why should you be removed from your home?... So, I think there should be more [house] building instead of penalising people because they are better off.”**

(SOCIAL TENANT, FEMALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

There was likewise very little support for the notion that renewal of tenancies should be linked to job search or volunteering activities, and even some shock that such a proposition should be entertained.

**“I just don’t agree with forcing people into volunteering, I think especially volunteering for jobs and things like that, I don’t really think it’s the landlord’s place or anything to do with your tenancy.”**

(LONE PARENT, FEMALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

Concerns about the ongoing administration and implementation of welfare conditionality leading to inappropriate decisions and outcomes were also widely expressed across the study. For example, a policy stakeholder compared the process of undergoing a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to the production of processed meat. They commented on how the extension of conditionality to incapacity benefits had led to some people with severe impairments being subject to unacceptable benefit sanctions despite obviously being unfit for paid employment.

**“Totally incapacitated due to an accident at work... didn’t turn up to his interview... ended up being sanctioned for six months... he’d gone into the ‘sausage machine’.”**

(FORMER GOVERNMENT MINISTER)

For many, the ethical legitimacy of welfare conditionality within current UK welfare provision was further undermined by its ineffectiveness in helping people enter and maintain paid work, the sometimes punitive impacts, and/or an inability to address the problems underlying anti-social behaviour or unemployment.

**“They’re doing nothing to help me at all apart from sending me on stupid courses which are absolutely a waste of time but it ticks their box. Yes, this man has been unemployed for the last six months, you’ll say, ‘We’ll send him on this course’. It comes back, nothing happening, send him another course.”**

(MALE JOBSEEKER, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

**“By giving me that ASBO it wasn’t solving the problem; it was just moving me on somewhere else. The problem being moving on to somewhere else, there was no support around that ASBO or anything to try and help me resolve the problem of being homeless.”**

(FEMALE, SUBJECT TO ASBO, ENGLAND, WAVE A)

**“What hasn’t helped me... bullying and sanctioning me and making me sign on every day. That had a really bad impact on me. I just had a breakdown.”**

(OFFENDER, FEMALE, ENGLAND, WAVE C)

# Key findings and recommendations from specific policy areas within the study

## Key findings

### Universal Credit

- Throughout the sample, and across the three waves of interviews, UC recipients were keen to work and demonstrated intense efforts to find jobs and/or self-employment.
- Despite constant and concerted job seeking activity, the overall picture in terms of employment outcomes was relatively neutral, with similar numbers of transitions from unemployment into paid work (15) as from paid work to unemployment (12). Sixteen interviewees were out of work at all waves of the study; eight of those were disabled or had a long-term health condition.
- Paid work was often experienced as elusive or transitory – more like a moving target than a destination.
- However, for the majority, the extensive and stringent conditionality of UC brought far more harm than good; did not ensure a move into paid work; and had little impact on meaningful in-work progression or sustainability.
- Conditionality was usually experienced negatively by both in-work and out-of-work recipients.
- Across the sample and over the three waves, the experience of UC conditionality held two core features:
  - persistent and anxiety-provoking threats to withdraw essential income without notice via sanctions for minor infringements (such as being late for a Jobcentre Plus appointment). Recipients felt at the mercy of unpredictable decisions beyond their influence.
  - heavy pressure to apply for a high volume of job vacancies (some of which were inappropriate), involving regular long hours of documented job search activity (for example, via Universal Jobmatch) – even for those already in paid work. Much of this mandatory activity was futile or counterproductive.

- Support was largely lacking and consisted mainly of ‘do-it-yourself’ online job searching. Recipients felt the system operated to ensure compliance with conditionality requirements, with minimal or no meaningful support to find work or negotiate more hours, higher pay or advancement.

### Jobseeking

- Overall, welfare conditionality (in the form of benefit sanctions and mandatory appointments at Jobcentre Plus and contracted-out back-to-work agencies) did not prompt ‘behaviour change’.
- Benefit sanctions, and the threat of them, resulted overwhelmingly in negative impacts. Many participants reported that fear of being sanctioned was counterproductive and that it prioritised compliance with meaningless activities that were ineffective for finding work.
- Jobcentre Plus offices were not regarded as being places of support and were described in largely negative terms. Yet even small gestures of empathy were appreciated by jobseekers and could dispel the prevalent sense of being treated impersonally.
- Mandatory support was often experienced as offering a low quality of service, involving access to facilities to monitor self-directed job search activity or basic and repetitive instructions. Several interviewees were sent on the same course multiple times.
- Whilst most jobseekers agreed that recipients who are capable of work should be expected to seek work actively as a condition of receiving their benefits, they felt a powerful sense of injustice at the way job search conditions were implemented in their own case, particularly if they had received a disproportionate or unjust sanction.
- Broadly, it was felt that there was an imbalance between the paucity of support provided and the looming threat of sanctions. Participants

who had experienced a sanction noted there was a lack of clarity or warning that their behaviour was sanctionable, that work coaches were too quick to resort to the use of a sanction, and that sanctions were disproportionate to the alleged transgression.

## Disability

- The extension of welfare conditionality to disabled people in receipt of incapacity benefits does little to facilitate their transitions into paid work.
- The application of welfare conditionality exacerbates many disabled people's existing illnesses and impairments. Its detrimental impact on those with mental health issues is a particular concern.
- The Work Capability Assessment is intrusive, insensitively administered and regularly leads to inappropriate outcomes in respect of disabled people's capabilities to undertake, or prepare for, paid employment.
- Benefit sanctions have no tangible positive effects in moving disabled people closer to paid work. As with other service user groups interviewed, benefit sanctions routinely trigger profoundly negative personal, financial and health impacts that are likely to move disabled people further away from the paid labour market.
- Personalised, negotiated packages of support can help disabled people to overcome the barriers they face and help facilitate entry into work. However, much of the mandatory training and job search support on offer to disabled people is of poor quality and is largely ineffective in enabling them to enter and sustain paid employment.
- In principle, disabled people were broadly supportive of individual welfare rights being linked to specified responsibilities. However, many were critical of the extension of sanctions-backed welfare conditionality to disabled people.

## Lone parenthood

- As currently implemented, welfare conditionality has had little tangible influence on lone parent interviewees' motivation to seek or increase their participation in paid employment. Almost all were already highly motivated to work, but prevented from doing so by a range of structural and/or personal barriers.

- The balance between sanctions and support is at present heavily weighted toward the former and this undermines the work activation agenda. Few of the families involved gained and sustained paid work for longer than a short period during the study. The majority were no closer to the labour market, and some had shifted further away given the effects of conditional welfare and/or personal crises.
- There is a mismatch between the mandatory support currently provided and the needs of most lone parents. For many interviewees, it was not intensive, personally tailored, or flexible enough; for some, it was too basic, generic and/or irrelevant. Access to affordable childcare remained a significant barrier for most.
- Insufficient account is taken of most lone parents' caring responsibilities when claimant commitments are devised. Some lone parent interviewees were sanctioned as a result of unreasonable expectations, DWP administrative errors, or failures of comprehension rather than deliberate non-compliance.
- Sanctions caused severe financial and psychological distress. The persistent threat of sanctions caused extreme anxiety, even when not enacted. Lone parent interviewees described doing all they could to protect their children from the effects of sanctions, but concerns about impacts on children (as innocent third parties) remain.
- Sympathy for the principles underpinning the promotion of paid work is widespread. The ethical legitimacy of the current system is however called into question by its ineffectiveness in helping lone parents gain and maintain work that provides income sufficient to improve their material wellbeing, and the profoundly negative impacts of sanctions on families already living in poverty.

## Migration

- The application of welfare conditionality within the UK social security system is routinely ineffective in activating migrants to enter paid employment.
- The threat and application of benefit sanctions generates universally negative outcomes for migrants. Rather than changing behaviour to compel migrants to look for work, sanctions trigger counterproductive compliance, that inhibits effective work search, and/or drive others away from collective welfare provision.



- Much of the available mandatory support is ineffective in assisting migrants to enter employment. Access to personalised support and appropriate targeted job search/application is a critical component in the rare and exceptional cases where migrants are supported off benefits and into work.
- The UK Government's recent systematic reduction and removal of certain EEA migrants' social rights alongside the application of additional specific work related conditions (such as the Genuine Prospect of Work Test) interact with the wider behavioural conditionality intrinsic in the UK social benefits system to compound the exclusion and poverty of EEA migrants.
- For many, though not all, migrants' limited English language skills act as a significant barrier to both an informed understanding of their rights and responsibilities in respect of the UK social welfare system, and entry to, and progression within, the paid labour market.
- Migrants are broadly supportive of a principle of welfare conditionality and regularly assert the legitimacy of claims to collective welfare benefits that are based on prior contribution through paid work, or a willingness to contribute in the future, rather than on the basis of need.

## Homelessness

- Enforcement measures do prompt some homeless people to discontinue harmful behaviours and/or engage with support, but they can also displace rough sleeping, begging and street drinking, cause those affected to disengage from support; and/or strengthen their resolve to continue participating in street culture.
- There is an increasing (but not unanimous) consensus amongst homelessness service providers in England that enforcement may be justified ethically if an individual's activities are harming themselves or others and they have refused offers of appropriate support. Homeless people endorse the use of enforcement in some circumstances, but resent measures that are implemented in an obviously discriminatory manner.
- As currently implemented, benefit sanctions do little to enhance homeless people's motivation to prepare for or seek work. They cause considerable distress and push some extremely vulnerable people out of the social security safety net altogether. Dealing with the 'fallout' from sanctions diverts support workers

away from assisting with accommodation and other support needs.

- There is a consensus amongst support providers and homeless people that while the sentiments behind increased benefit conditionality may be defensible, current implementation practices are extremely problematic and difficult to justify ethically.
- Provision of meaningful support was pivotal in all the cases of positive behaviour change reported. Gains in relation to work preparation and acquisition were greatest when support was intensive and individually tailored. This was also true as regards reduced involvement in street culture activities, wherein flexible and 'sticky' support was especially beneficial.

## Offending

- Jobcentre Plus finds it difficult to identify people who are vulnerable, with the result that many offenders do not claim the right benefit and are needlessly exposed to high levels of conditionality and sanctioning.
- Previous experience of benefit sanctions has, in many cases, prompted a switch from Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (Support). This was often facilitated by support staff in homelessness charities and drug/alcohol support agencies. The move to ESA had often helped to stabilise behaviour, especially when it was combined with various forms of support.
- Behaviour change begins with the individual but the process is complex, non-linear and individuals are susceptible to relapse. Sustained change has been founded upon respondents accessing stable accommodation and an array of support to deal with their vulnerabilities including the problems of poor health, addiction and homelessness. Many have volunteered in homelessness charities and drug/alcohol support agencies, which has provided invaluable opportunities to further cement positive change.
- Interventions and sanctions are not the only influences upon respondent behaviour. Offenders are most influenced to change (and not to change) by those closest to them. Consequently, positive change has often followed the development of new relationships and/or individuals distancing themselves from their former social networks.

- Many respondents have been adversely affected by the asymmetrical development of sanctions and support. None of those finding work had done so through Jobcentre Plus or the Work Programme. Moreover, the linking of ineffective mandatory employment support with sanctioning means that ‘support’ is increasingly experienced as punishment.
- Nevertheless, a few respondents had received comprehensive packages of support following release from prison including help with finding accommodation, applying for benefits, vocational training and guaranteed job interviews which had transformed their prospects.
- Support was unable to bring about behaviour change in some of those with deeply entrenched problems, especially drug/alcohol addictions and immersion in social networks primarily comprised of criminals which fuelled persistent offending.
- Benefit sanctions are unfair and ineffective. They fail to encourage individuals to engage with support in a meaningful way. Some saw their contact with Jobcentre Plus as a ‘game’ and became superficially more compliant with the directives of front-line staff. Moreover, many have reacted violently to the imposition of sanctions or resorted to ‘survival crime’ to cope with the loss of benefit.

### Anti-social behaviour/Family intervention

- The majority of research participants evidenced behaviour change and experienced changes to their circumstances during the period of the study.
- Given the multiple forms of vulnerability of the research participants, the process of behaviour change is complex and non-linear, varying considerably between individuals and over time, with periods of progress and regression.
- Interventions, particularly supportive mechanisms, were essential elements of these changes, although they were only one form of influence acting upon individuals and households. Many very significant outcomes, such as crisis management, improved routines and parenting and enhanced self-confidence and health, are often more difficult to capture than more measurable ‘hard’ transformative outcomes.
- The supportive role of Family Intervention Projects was identified as a key factor in the behaviour change achieved by many research participants,

with this support comprising direct intervention, signposting to other services and an advocacy role.

- In contrast, sanctions were viewed more negatively and ambiguously, especially where legal or financial sanctions were applied without an accompanying package of support. However, some respondents argued that sanctions could be important in triggering a motivation to change and encouraging engagement with, and adherence to, supportive intervention packages.
- Research participants recognised the impact of their problematic behaviour and the need for agencies to address this and, therefore, supported in principle the ethical basis of sanctions. However, they often challenged the application and utility of sanctions in their own cases.
- The ethical support for the necessity of some sanctions linked to ASB was contrasted with sanctions related to employment-based benefits, which were regarded as being unfair and ineffective. Similarly, the personalised, sustained and holistic support provided by Family Intervention Projects was contrasted with the impersonal, often automated, use of benefit sanctions.
- The growing use of benefit sanctions is fundamentally changing the nature of interaction between individuals and the services aimed at supporting them and raises new challenges in achieving behaviour change for the most marginalised groups in society.
- Poor communication meant some respondents did not understand the reasons for sanction, or the engagement with mandatory support and behavioural requirements placed on them.
- Many WSUs are broadly supportive of welfare rights being linked to specified responsibilities. They are, however, more critical of how welfare conditionality is being implemented.

### Social housing (fixed-term tenancies)

- There is little evidence that social tenants adjust their behaviour as a result of having a fixed-term rather than open-ended tenancy, other than in relatively minor ways (for example, some may be less likely to invest in home improvements).
- Most social tenants with FTTs were only mildly or moderately anxious about their tenancy status, in part because the termination date in all cases was at least

two years away. But it was a cause of considerable distress for a minority, especially older tenants, those with a disability or health problems, and some families with children.

- Tenants generally had only a vague idea of the grounds upon which their fixed-term tenancies may be terminated, though most had formed the (probably accurate) impression that their tenancies would be renewed so long as they did not run up rent arrears or engage in serious anti-social behaviour.
- The prospect that people's fixed-term tenancies could be terminated on the grounds of a rise in income was disapproved of by most tenants, and only a

small minority saw the idea of income-related rents (sometimes called 'pay to stay') as fair.

- There was likewise very little support for the notion that renewal of tenancies should be linked to job search or volunteering activities, even some shock that such a proposition should be entertained.
- There were considerably more mixed views on the notion that, in a context of acute pressure on the housing stock, under-occupation could be a legitimate reason for non-renewal where alternative suitable accommodation could be made available.



## Key policy recommendations relevant to specific areas within the study

### Universal Credit

- There is an urgent need to reform the benefit sanctions system to ensure that UC recipients are treated with empathy, dignity and respect.
- Financial penalties should be removed for households including vulnerable people, such as children, disabled people or those with long-term physical or mental health conditions;
- The length and severity of financial benefit sanctions should be reduced to ensure: a) proportionality (that ordinary occurrences like being a few minutes late for an appointment are related only to minor consequences that are not life-altering); b) human dignity (that recipients retain essential income to ensure basic human needs are met, including food, heat, shelter and health);
- The process of applying sanctions requires improvements to guarantee: a) compassionate consideration of 'good cause' for non-compliance; b) clear advance warning of the intention to apply a benefit sanction and c) an effective warning system that precedes any detrimental action.
- Conditionality-free UC trials should be tested.
- There is an urgent need to reconsider the application of counterproductive in-work conditionality.
- Easements to enable part-time working (and part-time job seeking) should be legally protected (rather than dependent on power-infused discretionary negotiations), particularly for carers (including mothers), disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.
- High quality support and training should be provided to enable more meaningful engagement with out of work UC recipients who are keen to find and retain paid work.
- The design of UC needs to be rethought to ensure that paid employment is financially viable and that working recipients are better off in employment and no longer live in poverty. For example: by increasing work allowances and reducing the taper at which UC is withdrawn in relation to earnings.
- Support systems should be free to use, easily accessible (it should be possible for a UC recipient

to speak to their work coach face-to-face at short notice) and flexible (JCP appointments should be flexible enough to allow compliant recipients to reschedule without penalty when they have good cause for non-attendance).

- Referral to courses and back-to-work support needs to offer clear advantages to the recipient, and avoid repeat referrals to similar basic courses.
- Conditionality-free back-to-work support should be tested.
- Universal Jobmatch should be replaced by a system of support that enables effective job outcomes, rather than facilitating sanctions.

### Jobseeking

- A rebalance should be sought between the threat of sanctions and the provision of support. High quality support and training should be provided to enable more meaningful engagement with jobseekers who are keen to find and retain paid work.
- The environment of Jobcentre Plus needs to be reviewed. Sufficient time should be incorporated into meetings to allow work coaches to provide individualised support.
- Referral to courses and back-to-work support needs to offer clear advantages to the recipient, and avoid repeat referrals to similar basic courses. Consideration should also be given by the UK Government to follow the Scottish Government in removing conditionality from the Work and Health Programme.
- The time spent making a claim should be used to assess at regular intervals whether adequate support is in place, and not used primarily to trigger automatic referrals to mandatory support. Particularly, triggering the intensification of conditionality, such as moving to a period of daily sign-ons at the end of a WP placement, should be halted where there is no evidence of effectiveness.
- Universal Jobmatch should be designed to enabled effective job outcomes, rather than to facilitate sanctions.
- There is a need for a widespread review of the current sanctions system to alter the severity of sanctions, introduce clear and adequate warning,

improve communication with recipients, and to ensure that sanctions are not applied to households where children, ill or disabled people will be impacted detrimentally.

## Disability

- In light of the growing body of evidence on the ineffectiveness of welfare conditionality in moving disabled people off social security benefits and into work, its use within the UK incapacity benefits system should cease.
- Policymakers' current preoccupation with ensuring compliance with work related conditions under threat of benefit sanction for disabled people placed in the Work Related Activity Group needs to be abandoned. ESA and UC require fundamental reform to prioritise supporting and incentivising those disabled people who choose to work to enter sustainable paid employment.
- Benefit sanctions should not be applied to those in receipt of incapacity benefits.
- The Work Capability Assessment is comprehensively failing. It should be replaced with a new assessment that emphasises a disabled person's eligibility to access out-of-work benefit based on the experience and level of impairment, illness or health condition.
- The quality of the support and training made available to help disabled people into employment needs to be significantly improved. This will only be achieved if frontline DWP staff and providers of the new Work and Health Programme work in collaboration with disabled people and their organisations to design personalised and negotiated packages of support that meet people's needs in respect of both paid work and welfare rights.
- If policymakers are serious about ensuring the social security of disabled people they must recognise the negative role that welfare conditionality plays in exacerbating illness and impairment among incapacity benefit claimants and endorse a more effective and ethical voluntary approach to employment support for disabled people.

## Lone Parenthood

- Lone parent flexibilities should be applied much more extensively than they currently are. Safeguards might be devised to ensure that lone parents' caring responsibilities are genuinely and consistently taken into account when claimant commitments are developed. The reinstatement of specialist lone parent job coaches across Jobcentres would support this agenda. Care should be taken to ensure that all lone parents fully understand their claimant commitments.
- The support provided by Jobcentres and Work Programme providers to lone parents should be much more intensive, individually tailored, and flexibly implemented than it currently is. This should capitalise on lone parents' existing motivations, skills, experience and interests, and focus on addressing the specific barriers to work they face on a case by case basis. Assistance with accessing high quality affordable childcare should be integral to all such support plans.
- [As has previously been suggested](#) by campaigning organisations, a duty could potentially be imposed on work coaches to ensure they have considered the impacts of every claimant commitment requirement on the children in lone parent families. A similar duty might be imposed on DWP Decision Makers to show they have considered the potential impact of a sanction on the household's child(ren).
- Heed should also be paid to [existing calls](#) for reform of the sanctions system. In particular, a stepped approach with early warnings should be adopted and the severity of financial penalties reduced such that no lone parent family (or indeed other household type) is left destitute as a consequence. Consideration might also be given to granting lone parents automatic entitlement to hardship payments.

## Migration

- The welfare conditionality inherent within the contemporary UK social security system needs to be rebalanced to focus firmly on support, rather than as sanction.
- Moving forwards, the UK government, devolved administrations and agencies involved in the delivery of conditional welfare benefits and interventions should undertake a fundamental review of the benefits and drawbacks of welfare conditionality, and the



compulsion it implies, in meeting citizens' basic needs and enabling paid work.

- Given the body of evidence that details the profoundly negative material, emotional and health impacts of benefit sanctions, their routine application should be suspended until their effectiveness in bringing about positive behaviour change, such as sustained entry into paid employment, is proven.
- The quality of the mandatory support and training on offer to migrants needs to be improved. It is particularly important that service provision is monitored to ensure that appropriate English language training and support is routinely available for migrants who do not speak English.
- When interacting with Jobcentre Plus routine access to interpretation services for migrant claimants who do not speak English (removed in 2014) should be reinstated. As a minimum, interpretation services should routinely be available, as required by claimants, when agreeing a Claimant Commitment or whenever the application of a benefit sanction is being considered or recommended.
- The restrictions and additional residency and work related conditions currently applied specifically in respect of EEA migrants' benefit rights should be removed.

## Homelessness

- 'Hard' forms of enforcement involving legal penalties should only be used to address rough sleeping and street culture as a last resort, when an individual's actions are harming themselves or others and offers of appropriately tailored, intensive and flexible support have been refused. Any enforcement action should be preceded and accompanied by intensive support provision. An individually tailored and stepped approach, involving warnings appropriate to each stage, should be employed in all cases.
- Expectations regarding work preparation or search need to take much greater account of homeless individuals' circumstances and vulnerabilities, including (as relevant) their: housing situation, physical health, mental health, literacy skills, language competency, computer proficiency, access to IT facilities, substance misuse, learning difficulties, and/or other recovery-related appointment commitments.

- DWP should provide greater clarity regarding the remit of and discretionary powers associated with 'the easement'. Eligibility criteria for easement entitlement should be expanded to include additional forms of homelessness (beyond rough sleeping and residence in supported accommodation) such as sofa surfing. Greater use should be made of the easement and DWP staff trained in its application.
- The support provided by Jobcentres and Work Programme providers to homeless people needs to be much more intensive, individually tailored, and flexibly implemented than it currently is. This should more fully recognise many homeless claimants' [distance from the labour market](#), capitalise on existing motivation to work, and focus on overcoming any barriers faced on a case by case basis. Serious consideration should be given to the expansion of [Individual Placement Support](#) schemes to support this agenda.
- Heed should be taken of [existing calls](#) for reform of the sanctions system. In particular, a stepped approach with early warnings should be adopted and the severity of financial penalties reduced such that no-one is left [destitute](#) as a consequence of sanctioning. Care should be taken to ensure that homeless people and other vulnerable claimants fully understand their claimant commitment obligations and any consequences for failing to meet them.



## Offending

- It is vital that individuals are claiming the right benefit in conditional welfare regimes. Jobcentre Plus work coaches should be given sufficient time and resources to establish the full needs of new claimants and determine the most appropriate benefit to claim.
- Behavioural conditionality is not appropriate for those with multiple and complex needs. Benefits such as ESA (Support) can play an important stabilising role when combined with other forms of support. Access to higher benefit levels combined with less stringent conditionality can provide the necessary resources and 'space' for individuals to begin to address their multiple needs.
- Government should recognise that benefit sanctions have exacerbated the vulnerability of marginalised individuals and increased the challenges that front-line staff face in working with them. The indications are that many will have been subjected to aggression and violence.
- Volunteering might be promoted to those claiming ESA (Support) since it can allow some offenders to rediscover their agency and develop pro-social identities.
- The provision of additional support to vulnerable groups like offenders should be delivered on a voluntary basis and not increase their exposure to punitive benefit sanctions.
- Much of the support provided by Jobcentre Plus is most relevant to those closest to the labour market. Many respondents need vocational training to improve their long-term prospects. Our research has confirmed that comprehensive packages of support combining help with finding accommodation, applying for benefits, vocational training, work trials and guaranteed job interviews can transform the lives of ex-prisoners.
- Those with multiple and complex needs have not been well served by the privatisation of employment support services. Much greater care needs to be given to devising procurement exercises and contracting regimes that prioritise meeting the needs of participants.
- The Work and Health Programme will provide specialised support for those unemployed for over two years and, on a voluntary basis, to those with health

conditions and disabilities. The voluntary nature of participation is welcome but we are concerned that the resources allocated to the Programme do not match its ambition and recommend that service providers are selected that are committed to providing the necessary support to participants.

- Many jobseekers who would previously have been supported by the Work Programme will now receive support directly from Jobcentre Plus rather than the Work and Health Programme. Jobcentre Plus has a tarnished reputation amongst many of those taking part in this research. We welcome the Green Paper commitment to build and develop the capacity of work coaches and the intention of recruiting around 200 community partners to bring expertise from the voluntary sector into jobcentres.

## Anti-social behaviour

- The Scottish and UK Governments, local authorities and their partner organisations should continue to develop and resource intensive intervention projects, based on a key worker model. This should be complemented by the retention and development of skilled project workers and access to a range of specialist support services. In particular, there is a need to enhance support services for individuals who have experienced trauma and bereavement.
- Legal and financial sanctions and forms of conditionality linked to anti-social behaviour should always be used in tandem with support packages that provide the basis for individuals to adhere to the conditions imposed by these sanctions.
- Government should recognise how employment and disability-related benefit sanctions have exacerbated the vulnerability of marginalised individuals and significantly increased the workloads and challenges for agencies and organisations working with them. Although this research found no evidence that benefit sanctions were related to positive behaviour change, if such sanctions are to be retained, their use should be more closely aligned to the forms of personalised support already commonly used in combination with anti-social behaviour-related sanctions.
- The evaluations and assessment of anti-social behaviour and family support interventions, by both central government and commissioning bodies, should acknowledge the centrality of soft outcomes as essential building blocks to transformative

outcomes and that significant behaviour change and progress may often have been achieved even where all hard outcome measures have not been delivered. In particular, there should be recognition that outcomes related to employment are not always appropriate, and certainly should not be prioritised, in intensive interventions.

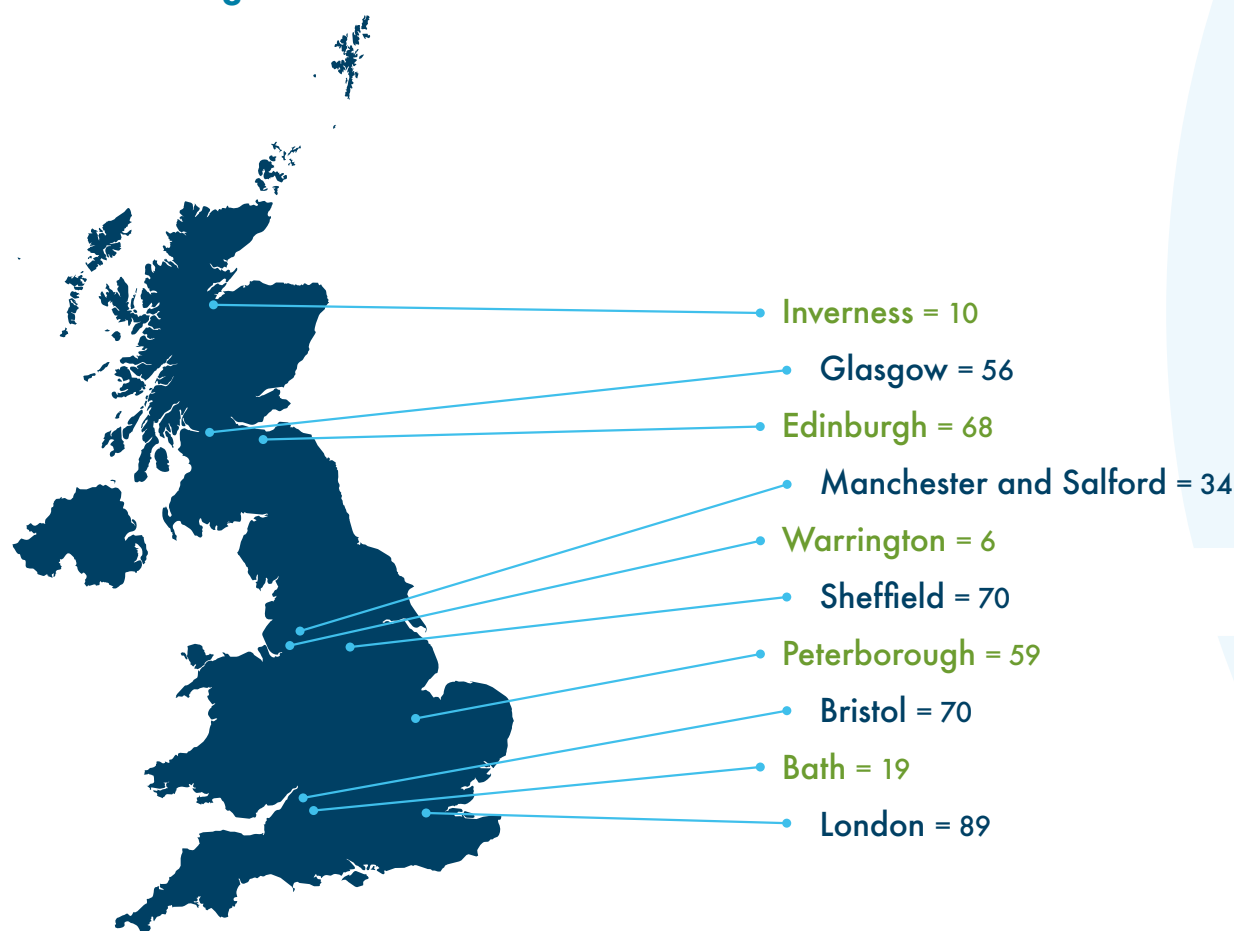
- There remains a need for a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the long-term sustainability of behaviour change post-intervention periods.

## Social housing

- The FTTs policy framework should be abandoned. It has no discernible positive impact on tenant behaviour, nor is it likely to generate substantial additional lettings for households in need, given that the overwhelming majority of FTTs will in all likelihood be renewed. Its only achievement is to instil varying levels of anxiety in social tenants, and to cause real distress to some.
- The government should not bring into force the relevant sections of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 that would compel local authorities to use FTTs in almost all new lets.

- If this legislation is brought into force, complete exemptions for older people, those with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups should be made, and local authorities should have the ability to offer 10 year tenancies to all new social tenants.
- Housing associations that have already adopted FTTs should consider reversing this decision, and other social landlords contemplating this option should not pursue it given the weight of evidence regarding the relative costs and benefits doing so.
- For these reasons, local authorities should use FTTs to the minimum extent permissible by law.
- Policy makers should note that 'Pay to stay' seems to command little support as an alternative to FTTs with higher income tenants.
- The forthcoming Social Housing Green Paper provides a key opportunity to act on these recommendations, and to ensure that the vital role that social housing plays in providing people not just with accommodation, but with a 'home', is properly recognised.

**Figure 7: Location and numbers of WSU wave a interviews**





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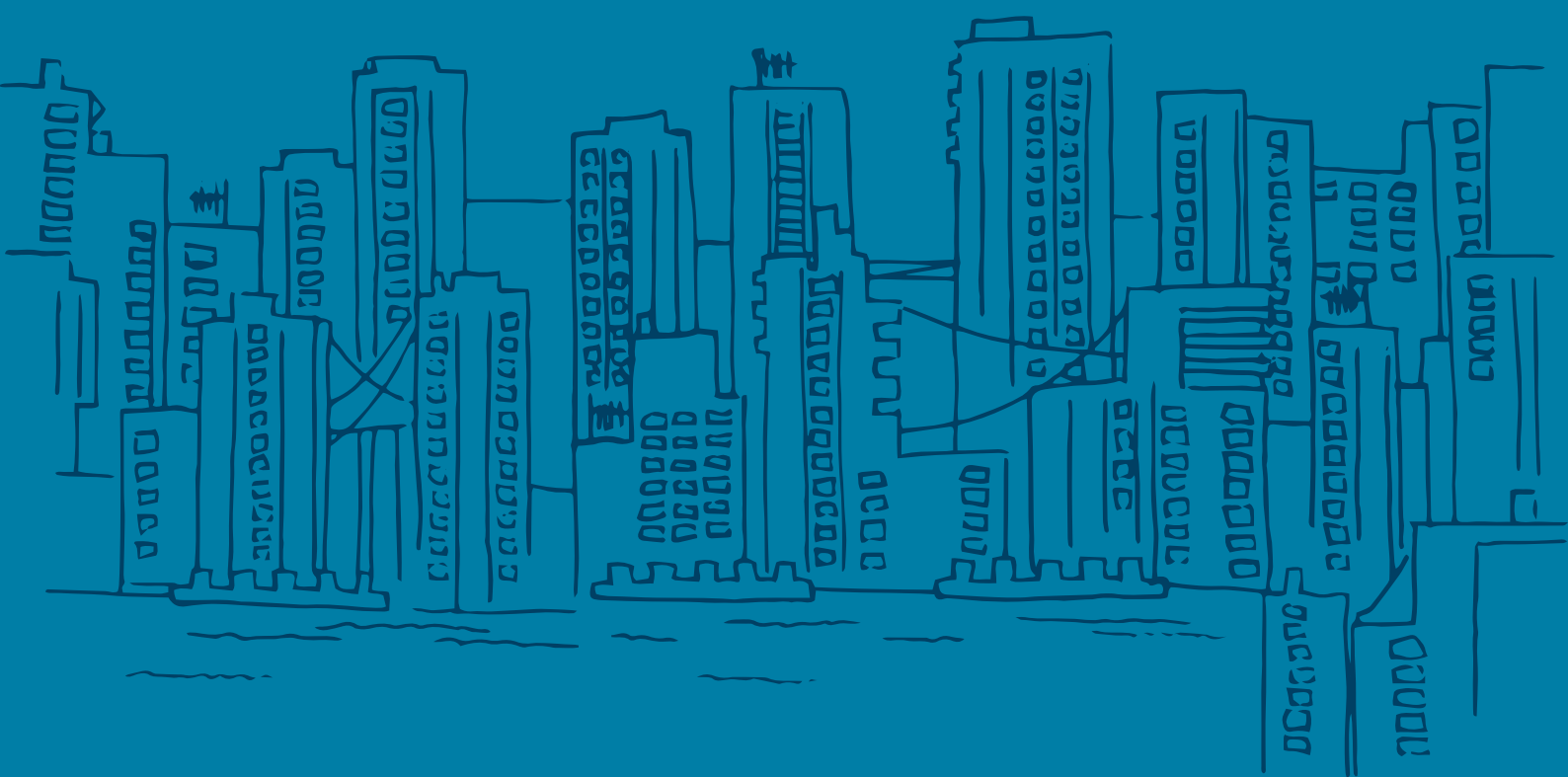
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Other briefings in this series and full list of references can be found at [www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/publications](http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/publications). Data from the study will be available from 2019 at [www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk).

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